

Harrisburg Man Builds New Life . . . continued

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completed because Gary wanted Alan to start working as soon as possible.

“This makes such a great story,” she said. “Darnall Feedlot was so accommodating!” In fact, Darnall’s agreed to do all of the labor required with its own employees.

The final arrangement to be made was funding. Voc Rehab agreed to fund the modifications. They worked with Carolyn at Assistive Technology; the relationship that these sister agencies have forged is long lasting and strong. Some of the modifications necessary included an ergonomic, accessible workstation with adaptive equipment, adding a ramp where there had been a step, changing the direction that the door to the bathroom swings and also widening the door, and adding a convex mirror to

make the scale he is required to use daily more easily visible. Alan’s job is challenging. On a feedlot that can house 20,000 head of cattle he says, “We have to keep a tremendous amount of records.”

Olsen is enthusiastic about the work he is doing and says there is some opportunity to move up at Darnall’s. He is complementary of Vaughn Patrick and Pat Kraemer saying, “They were really helpful... they would call me periodically just to see how things were going and if there was anything else I needed.” His personal life is also full. He has six children and doesn’t let his disability affect his daily life.

“I’m really independent, I can do just about anything... tell me I can’t do it and I’ll show you you’re wrong!” □

Quality Employment Solutions® is an official publication provided by Vocational Rehabilitation, Nebraska Department of Education. It is published to exchange information on rehabilitation services and topics of mutual interest to Nebraskans involved in working with people with disabilities.

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Vocational Rehabilitation
Nebraska Department of Education
State of Nebraska
P.O. Box 94987
Lincoln, NE 685091

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Nebraska Department of Education

Issue 50

Harrisburg Man Builds New Life

Alan Olsen reshapes his life after a shocking accident.

November 23, 1990: Alan Olsen fell 105 feet from a tower, over ten stories. The once construction worker broke his neck, collar bone, shoulder blades, ribs, lacerated his liver, punctured his lungs, ruptured his spleen and ruined his gallbladder. Much of his rehabilitation took place in Denver, Colorado. When Alan returned home six months later, his six foot two inch frame supported only 120 pounds, considerably less than the 195 pounds he weighed before the accident. Although he would permanently use a wheelchair, his positive attitude and determination to live independently triumphed over his limitations.

After his rehabilitation and still adjusting to his disability, Olsen made the decision to return to college. It was clear that Worker’s Compensation Court should fund his education, however Voc Rehab in Scottsbluff provided added support. They helped with the little things. For instance, paying for gas so that Alan could afford to commute to school regularly. He completed his education with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration.

The problem now was securing a job in the small town where he lived. Work

opportunities were extremely scarce. Olsen knew that Voc Rehab offered the services he now needed. Vaughn Patrick and Pat Kraemer worked to find a career for Alan. It was discovered that with only one extra class, he could substitute teach. Voc Rehab funded the class and Alan went to work. Unfortunately he was allowed to work only very limited hours with the education he had. For that reason Alan decided to move on. Next, Olsen touched base with Gary Darnall. Gary owned Darnall Feedlot and had known Alan since childhood. He mentioned that Darnall’s needed someone to fill a position in record keeping.

Alan and his counselors at Voc Rehab talked with the feedlot to make sure that the working conditions and duties were a good fit. They were. Next, certain accessibility issues in the office had to be faced. If the employer isn’t comfortable with the changes to be made, this step can be a major cause for stress. However, when Carolyn Applegate, Technology Specialist, with the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP), went to assess the office setting and decide what changes would be necessary, she found a more than willing Gary and Lane Darnall. ATP’s program, Solutions on Site, lent Alan a portable ramp to use until the modifications were



Alan Olsen

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The Key to Lincoln Woman's Future

Career Change Creates Bright Prospects.

Julie Berger was trying to find a job. After a suggestion from Workforce Development she met with the staff at Vocational Rehabilitation in Lincoln.

Now, Julie is on the road to steady employment. Currently, she works for the Nebraska Health and Human Services System in a temporary job assembling mailings and preparing envelopes for postage. She credits Voc Rehab Associate Angie Thiel in helping her find her current position.

Following surgery, Julie was unable to return to Home Care Specialties-Tabitha, where she cleaned houses. The lifting and vacuuming made the job uncomfortable for Julie. But rather than give up, she set out on a new career path with Angie's help. Through her visits to Vocational Rehabilitation she was able to increase her typing speed and become better prepared for clerical positions.

After seeing the rewarding results, Julie plans to continue that training and further advance her skills. Angie credits Julie's success to her outlook:

"It's been amazing," she said. "The first thing we noticed was her dedication. When she came in she needed to learn a new field and she was starting from scratch."

Julie came to Voc Rehab with a typing speed of 10 words-per-minute. After consistent training and practice she said she has been able to increase that speed to 37 words-per-minute.

"If it's been awhile I'll come in and work hard to get (the typing speed) back up to where it needs to be." Since improving her skills, Julie has been able to apply for jobs that require specific typing speeds, which she can now meet and exceed.

"So that's definitely in her favor," Angie said.

Julie also wanted to use those new skills in on-the-job situations. Again, Vocational Rehabilitation set her in

"I don't know what

I would have done

without them."



Julie Berger

the right direction to get that valuable experience.

One of her on-the-job employers was the State Department of Corrections, where she filed documents and answered phones. The Capitol Humane Society also gave her on-the-job training. Those employer relationships have given her solid letters of recommendation to look for similar work.

Angie said Julie's success was so great with the Corrections department that they would have hired her for a full-time position if one were available.

During the slow economic climate in recent months, Julie has seen rejections like many other job applicants across the country. Angie said Julie's attitude is keeping her upbeat and focused on her career path.

"With the economy right now people are getting rejections," Angie said. "She's weathered that. She's deter-

mined to stay positive and just applies somewhere else." Angie added that her determination serves as a reminder to Voc Rehab staff that her success and attitude are what they are there for.

Julie said that in the future she'd like to find a permanent job, but will keep taking temporary positions as they come, which she added will only give her more valuable experience.

Working with Vocational Rehabilitation has given Julie more than just training, however. She specifically mentioned her relationship with Voc Rehab staff as one of the positives of working with the program.

"I don't know what I would have done without them," she said. One of the advantages of working is that she can have her own money and be out among the public, Julie said. "Angie has also been a good friend; she's been someone to talk to when I need to."

Angie agreed that the relationship has been rewarding: "It makes me really happy to see her growth as well." □

Lifelines

Omaha woman achieves independence by helping others.

Pat LaMere knew what it meant to have a helping hand and compassion in times of need; and she was determined to offer that lifeline to others. After a terrible accident, Pat became Quadriplegic. She will use a wheelchair for the rest of her life. One of her lifelines, more than a decade later would be Vocational Rehabilitation.

In 1985 Voc Rehab sent Pat to Seattle, Washington for rehabilitation. Afterward, she would choose to stay and further her education. Voc Rehab in Seattle agreed to fund it. However, the hard times weren't over. Unfortunately, six months after securing a job there, she fell and broke her Tibia. Ultimately, Pat returned home to Omaha.

She considered entering the workforce right away, but ultimately made the decision to remain at home and raise her young children. Her daughters were grown, but she had two sons that still needed her at home.

When her children were a little older, Pat realized that she wanted to do more. She was an active volunteer for her church, but wanted a part-time job. Once more, she applied at Vocational Rehabilitation. She met Shobha Ayyappan, her Voc Rehab Counselor. Pat knew that she wanted to give back to the community and to help people.

"Some people are really grateful because you know there's a need out there and it makes you feel good that you've helped someone out," Pat commented.

Hoping to get her foot in the door, she began to volunteer for Together, Inc. It is a wonderful non-profit agency that helps people in need of prescriptions, utility assistance, bus tickets, food, clothing, etc.

Together, Inc. first came into existence in 1975. A staggering tornado had left many residents without some of life's necessities and a community agency was needed to support their needs.

"Her employer has

been a wonderful

source of support

and encouragement."

– Shobha Ayyappan



Pat LaMere

Vocational Rehabilitation provided Pat with bus tickets to get to and from the workplace.

Pat enjoyed her position there, and it wasn't long before they hired her on as a part-time employee. Just six months later, a salary increase and full-time job were hers. Pat now works full-time in the Together, Inc. clothing store. She supervises all of the other volunteers, on some days as many as eight.

"I don't think I could have started a job right off the bat without working into it, especially in my situation," Pat said. Now she has received yet another promotion.

Shobha was so complimentary of Together, Inc. "Her employer has also made several work accommodations for her at the workplace and been a wonderful source of support and encouragement."

Since landing her full-time position, one of many accomplishments has been the purchase of a vehicle. Vocational Rehabilitation sent her for a driver's evaluation and funded hand controls to allow easy access to the gas and brake. Now she'll only need to use public transportation on bad weather days. Even though Pat uses a wheelchair, one of her favorite aspects of the job is her mobility and interaction with others. It helps her to stay active, and keeps her from getting bored.

Although Pat enjoys her job, she is still ambitious. As a Winnebago and Santee Sioux, she hopes to one day own a store that sells Native American Crafts.

Pat's success is also a victory for Vocational Rehabilitation. Shobha Ayyappan is so excited for Pat, saying, "...it is indeed admirable to see her blending her roles as a mother, wife and employee and being such an exemplary individual... I wish her continued success." □